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WALLPAPER

*A Picture-Book of
Examples in the Collection of
The Cooper Union Museum*

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The Cooper Union Museum*

**THE COOPER UNION MUSEUM
COOPER SQUARE, NEW YORK, N. Y.**

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Among the many donors whose gifts of wallpaper have brought to the Cooper Union Museum what is believed to be the most representative study collection of the subject available in the United States, especial thanks are recorded to the Donors of wallpaper illustrated in the following pages:

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1903-11-12

Width of detail, 20 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

MANY YEARS after man first decided that shelter was not enough to satisfy his desire for comfort, beauty and convenience, the earliest forerunner of wallpaper, as it is known today, made its appearance in European interiors. Although the affixing of materials to interior walls permits easier maintenance than does an unfinished surface, in addition to pleasant visual and tactile properties — a practice occurring early in the transition from rude shelter into comfortable house — it was not until the late 16th and 17th centuries that these same properties suggested themselves in the use of leather hangings on the wall. Totally different in character from the rich brocaded hangings and tapestries which preceded them, they are today acknowledged to be the first true wall-covering; affixed to the walls, that is, for indefinite service. Heavily embossed, gilded, painted, varnished and even occasionally flocked, decorative leather hangings were well suited to the fashions of the aristocratic interiors of the 17th century. Baroque patterns were particularly at home in this medium, often incorporating Indian and Chinese motifs as are seen in this section of a leather wall-hanging produced in Holland around the year 1680.

Along with decorated leather, flock hangings exist still today as an important type of wall-covering. Widely used first during the 17th century as a less expensive substitute for woven hangings, the technique of sprinkling chopped wool or silk over a surface upon which a design had been printed, stencilled or painted with an adhesive — so that the chopped threads would adhere to only the treated portion — very effectively suggested the rich pattern and textural effects of velvets or brocatelles. First applied to canvas, and later to paper, flocked patterns competed most successfully with their original source of inspiration. Having survived the constant changes in fashions and tastes during the past three centuries, this technique still enriches many of the papers produced today.

The strong baroque pattern of this French hanging of about 1700 impressively illustrates the early success of flocking in its effort to duplicate another medium. A dark green flock on a gilded canvas ground represents an entirely different approach to design than is to be found on the leather hanging; here, a flat linear and even lacy pattern remains more faithful to the qualities inherent in good textile design.



1955-51-1

Width, 31½"

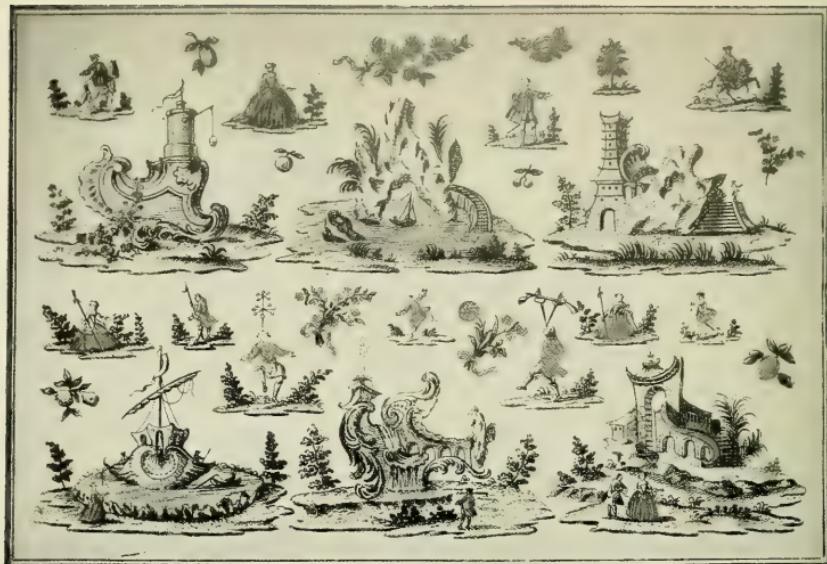


1954-132-1

Width, 13 $\frac{5}{8}$ "

Concurrently with the appearance of the substitute hangings of the 17th century, small sheets of block-printed paper were being manufactured on the Continent which contributed substantially to the eventual rise of the wallpaper industry. In Germany, the makers of "Dutch gilt papers"¹ designed and printed their work to serve a variety of purposes, including that of adding warmth and pleasure to an interior when affixed to a wall.

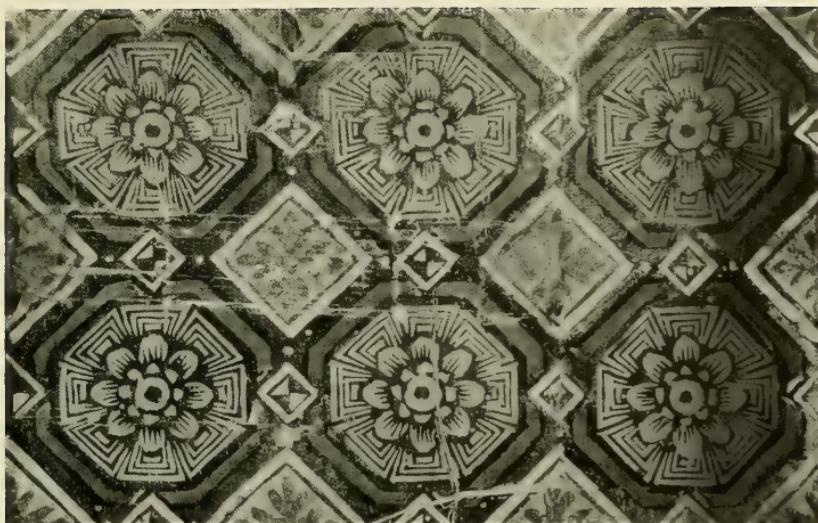
From the Museum's collection comes this especially delightful example of a gilt and block-printed bookpaper of the early 18th century. Although the detailed, unsophisticated drawing of the "island" vignettes is still in the tradition of German peasant textiles from the previous century, the designer has made no attempt to duplicate the effect of a textile.



1924-41-1

Width, 9 $\frac{1}{8}$ "

The enlivening of a bare wall does not require yards of silk or leather or paper, as the enterprising publishers of Augsburg realized when they issued sheets, plain or colored, all ready for scissors and paste. The economy of this means of making a wall more interesting commended itself to householders up and down the Continent for several decades just before wallpaper, as we now know it, came into being; and the pleasure of selecting and arranging the isolated figures printed on these sheets must have been an added incentive, especially to ladies who knew the value of a beauty spot applied to a face. Such decorations, both of walls and of faces, are ephemeral; but a few rooms remain even now whose walls bear little figures cut from the sheets of Augsburg print-makers.



1928-2-81

Width, 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

The work of the Dominotiers² from the 17th century into the 18th century in France and Italy is the most important and well known non-imitative ancestor of wallpaper. These printed or stencilled papers, often hand-colored, while originally intended for the lining of chests and drawers, or for the covers and end-pages of books, were also used to cover an interior wall. More often found, at first, on the chimney breast, such small sheets of gay decoration provided a most economical alternative for textile and leather hangings. Strongly influenced by printed textile designs, the patterns for these early papers served well in the houses of those who were unable to afford the more expensive forms of wall-covering.

The paper illustrated is a characteristic example, printed in black ink from a woodblock, its coloring brushed onto it through stencils. This sheet was probably executed in France shortly after 1700 when, as might be expected in an art essentially popular, new ideas of patterning had not yet displaced the solid, overcrowded designs of the preceding century. Fifty years later, taste had set firmly in another mode, more closely allied to that of textile patterning.



1955-50-1

Width shown, 30 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

For a brief period during the mid-18th century an especially interesting form of wall-covering, known primarily by its German name of *Wachstuch*,³ came into use. A fabric wall-covering with a printed and stencilled or painted design, it was an important link in Germany between leather wall-hangings and the more widely used but less sturdy paper hangings.

Above is a particularly fine example of this technique, obtained through exchange with the Tapeten-Museum in Kassel.⁴ Against a soft blue ground-color are block-printed the black outlines of gracefully curving serpentine vines, with their blossoms and foliage still bright with greens, yellow and a vibrant red, painted in by hand. Manufactured about 1760 by Johann Benjamin Nothnagel (1729-1804), this German wall-hanging is a most eloquent reminder of the beauty to be found in such a medium, and should perhaps suggest additional directions which the equally sturdy synthetics of today have yet to explore.



1938-62-24

Width, 21"

Indian printed cottons and, to a lesser degree, Chinese painted papers were well established on the western market by the mid-18th century.⁵ The popularity of their exotic designs was so great that the effect of their early influence is still felt in many patterns of today. Strongly suggested in the *Wachstuch*, an even more conspicuous demonstration of this influence is to be found in the pattern of an outstanding block-printed English wallpaper of about 1765.⁶ Originally hung in the Jeremiah Lee Mansion in Marblehead, Massachusetts, it bears a fairly literal translation of what is popularly called the "Tree of Life" design that is singularly compatible with its finely-diapered green background, closely related in scale and drawing to the geometric bookpapers of a strictly western origin.

In Jean-Baptiste Réveillon (1725-1811) French wallpaper found the man to raise it suddenly from a routine production to an artistic achievement. Beginning in the late 1750's, at the time when cotton-printing in France made its upward swing in the work of a Bavarian, Oberkampf, the Paris-born Réveillon produced excellent wallpapers through giving close attention to quality in design no less than to improvement in technical procedures. As the period's most accomplished decorative designers were French, he was readily able to commission from them work that brings forward into our own day an intimate impression of their attainments. And of his own: it may be regarded as suitably symbolic that the first balloon ascent, in 1783, was made from the gardens of his establishment.

"The Hunt with a Falcon," the paper here illustrated, shows the success of Réveillon's figural wallpapers; those patterned in other modes were equally well composed, in scale and color, for the rooms for which they were prepared.



1931-45-28

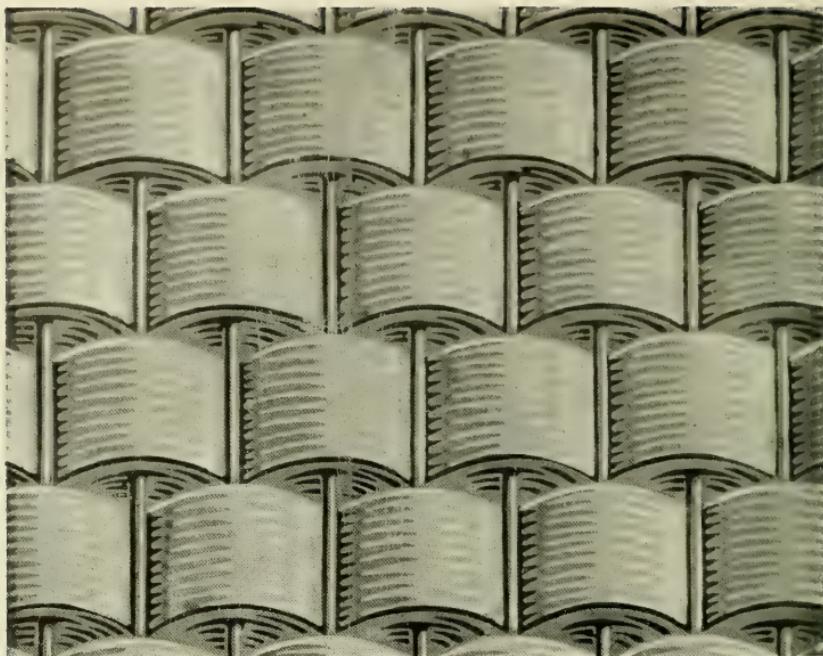
Width, 21½"



1950-77-2

Width of detail, 5"

It was during the second half of the 18th century that wallpaper emerged from a somewhat hesitant and desultory infancy into a major element of interior decoration, as may be seen from this original design dated 1795.⁷ Greatly influenced by the work of Jean-Baptiste Réveillon, the drawing is of a transitional design current during the last years of the 18th century. Incorporating gracefully curving bouquets and foliage with colorful motifs from the wall-paintings of Pompeii, a combination characteristic of the last quarter of the century, it also heralds the Empire style with the use of varying rectangular forms.

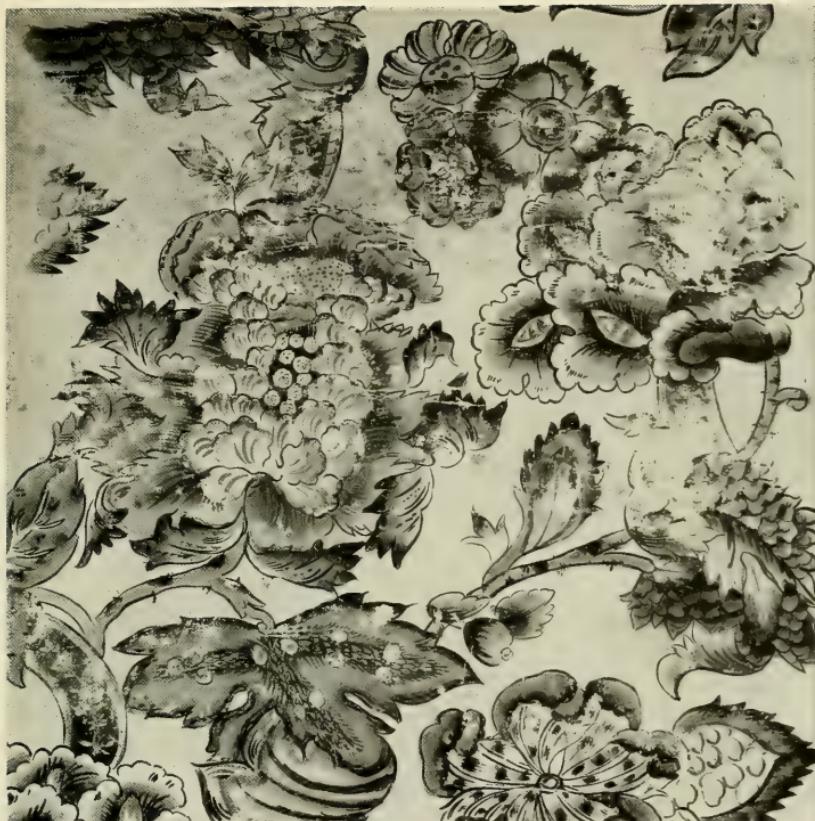


1931-45-16

Width of detail, 12"

In marked contrast to the outstanding productions of Réveillon and his contemporaries are the small-patterned and textured papers of the late 18th century. In this block-printed basketwork pattern of about 1790, an especially convincing imitative effect is achieved through the use of grisaille. A paper of this sort did not aim to persuade its user that he lived in a basket; rather, its purpose was to set up an agreeable, if somewhat irrelevant, foil to the furnishings of daily living. The suggestion of a three-dimensional surface, printed only in several values of a neutral tone, represents an entirely different approach to the covering of a wall from that of the more celebrated panel papers.

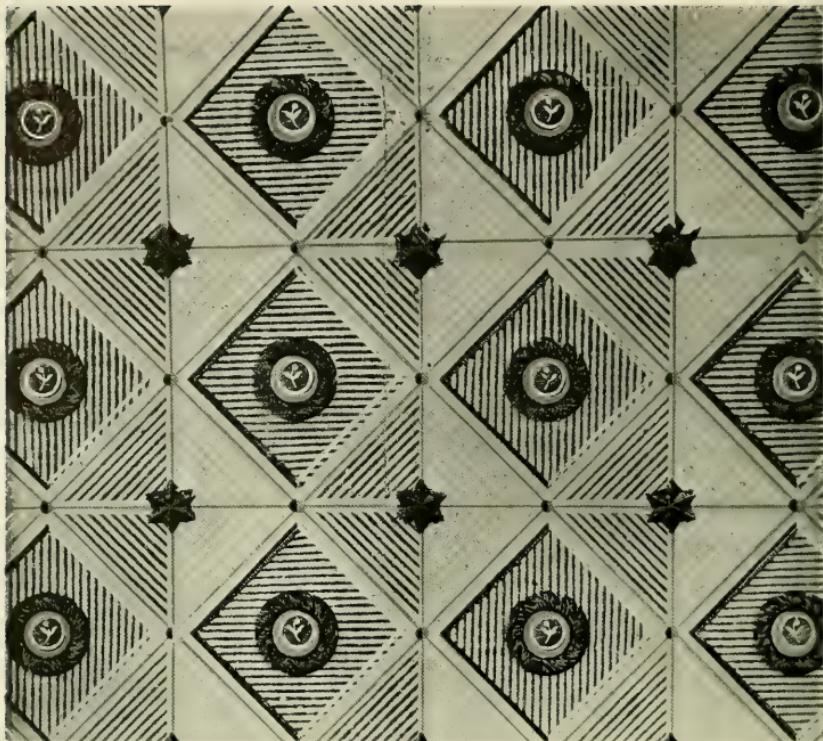
The attempt to suggest such bold relief on a flat surface is a device that was greatly to change the character of wallpaper design during the 19th century. Linear, two-dimensional design was already at this time beginning to be supplemented by clever, illusionistic tricks. Here are seen the beginnings of another taste in interior settings.



1955-144-6

Width shown, 20"

The painting of papers was by no means excluded as printing techniques developed; during the 18th century, as later on, many good examples were produced. Mural-like panels lend themselves readily to this practice, but somewhat more surprising are the hand-painted papers of a traditional repeat pattern, such as the expertly drawn and brilliantly colored floral paper,⁸ painted in London around 1790, reproduced above. Its boldly-conceived flowers reflect the close similarity in design of wallpapers and printed textiles that existed at the end of the 18th century, no less than in our own day.



1949-144-2

Width of detail, 14"

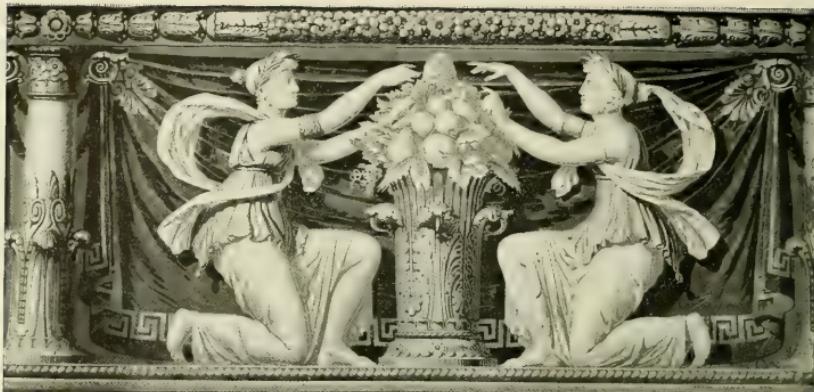
Not always had walls to be covered with flowers and birds; geometric patterns came into favor early in the 19th century. We may admire the designer who had the imagination, and the restraint, to produce the pleasing textural quality of this block-printed paper with strong accents of orange, pale green, black and white against a clear blue ground-color. Although the paper is thought to have been made in France about 1800, it is not inconceivable that a paper of such excellent quality should have been produced in the United States. Despite the surprisingly large number of "paper stainers" listed in American city directories of the late 18th century, practically nothing is now known of their work; could not some of it have been of the quality of the piece here illustrated?



1960-103-1

Width of repeat, 20 $\frac{3}{8}$ "

Reference to the events of the moment is a profitable means of pleasing the customer and making the producer well-off; and there is nothing very new about this fact. The wallpaper here illustrated is a rather special instance, however, of timely designing in wallpaper, for the history of the paper is known and it provides us with a rare survival giving evidence of design and production in the United States in the year 1800. Columbia, accompanied by Justice, mourns the Father of this Country, standing beside a funerary urn; the fenced enclosure is reminiscent of the circular iron railing at Bowling Green, in New York, within which had stood an equestrian statue of George III, overthrown in July of 1776; the arched architectural framework of the repeating pattern must have been reused from an earlier paper, as its style is closer to that of the 1770's than to the turn of the 19th century. The paper, simply printed in black, grey and white on a blue ground, was made in Boston by Ebenezer Clough.



1955-213-1

Height, 21 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

When coarsened with more self-assertive and literal forms, the classic revivalism of Napoleon's Empire over-compensated for its loss of the pre-revolutionary lightness and elegance. A block-printed frieze of about 1805, strongly colored and conceived in heavy, sculptural terms, has drawn on a different aspect of classical antiquity than that which had inspired the designers of the 1770's; here we are reminded inescapably of the "official" and almost humorless style favored by the new rulers of France.



1950-59-1

Height of detail, 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

In every age, no less than in our own, the exotic has quickened in man's imagination the play of fancy and invention. Very often the original source of inspiration is misinterpreted, misunderstood, or poorly hybridized, but in the hands of a master designer even the most unlikely combinations have been composed into work of great style.

Chinoiserie,⁹ on the wane after nearly a century of great popularity and influence, made a brief but triumphant return in the decoration of the Royal Pavilion at Brighton for the Prince Regent, later George IV. Wallpapers designed for the Pavilion were boldly drawn and brilliantly colored under the supervision of Frederick Crace. This portion of block-printed paper¹⁰ is only one of several in the Museum's collection from a group produced for the King's Bedroom. Together with a dado of pseudo-Chinese, geometric balustrading, designed to be joined at the base of this panel, the set combines some of the more bizarre characteristics of Regency fancy within a magnificent composition of warm ochre, bright yellow and a neutral grey.



1960-12-1

Width of panel, 30 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

Among the many types of wallpaper developed by the French producers, high rank was attained by the seemingly endless series of panoramas, or scenic papers, issued by Dufour and other manufacturers in the early decades of the 19th century. Sets composed of twenty, thirty or even a greater number of widths of paper were printed, sometimes in grisaille, sometimes in a rich range of color; always, from a number of woodblocks that far exceeded the number of comparable screens economically advisable in today's silk-screen printing. Such French scenic papers were hung in many a fine house in the United States; their far-ranging choice of subject-matter, drawn from classical antiquity, contemporaneous travel books, or the imagination of the designer, commended them to the walls of American houses in the early days of our expanding contact with far places across the seas. The illustration shows six widths of Dufour's 1814 set, *The French in Egypt*, used on a folding screen.



1942-73-1

Width shown, 25"

Even the scenic wallpapers, like today's movies, sooner or later return to the starting-point, though they require more widths to do so than does an ordinary repeating pattern. The single, non-repeating pictorial paper, however, should not be forgotten, for it has been much used in the past century and a half to meet varied requirements. The early 19th-century French example here illustrated might have been used as the central element in a wall panel, or even as an overdoor, though the white cat actually gave her first life of service, before entering the Museum's collections, as the adornment of a fireboard.

The 19th century was an age of many stylistic revivals. From the classic solidity of Napoleonic France and the violent Chinoiserie of Brighton to the leftovers unevenly warmed up by Victorian eclecticism, these were years when decorative elements reappeared in strength again and again, often after periods of neglect and even disrepute. In the second quarter of the century a return to the classical spirit moved the designers of those times to turn once again to the ancient world for their inspiration. If their glance backward was more objective than that of their 18th-century counterparts or the didactic builders of the Empire style, it yet was highly colored by the romantic spirit of the times, as seen from this block-printed panel of about 1850. From a series of the Four Continents, Africa — an Egyptian lady of obviously post-Alexandrian times — fixes the spectator with an inscrutable gaze while relaxing her stance from that of a Roman Deity to the ease and strength of the Noble Savage. A monochrome panel, printed in shades of brown, it makes use of a device often found in the textural papers produced today. The simulated wood-graining of the background is here used to relieve pleasantly the monotony of an otherwise plain surface, and at the same time serves to accentuate the volume of the figure.



1955-51-4

Width, 20 $\frac{1}{4}$ "



1953-134-3

Width, 20 1/4"

Also during the mid-19th century, Gothic elements were once again put to use in the vocabulary of the decorative arts. Almost one hundred years after Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill,¹¹ Augustus W. N. Pugin (1812-1852) advocated the use of Gothic ornament with a fervor that foretold William Morris's preachments and the return of a two-dimensional approach to wallpaper design. In this paper, executed in two shades of green flock, one of a series produced between 1848 and 1860 for the Houses of Parliament, Pugin has presented symbols of Great Britain in a restrained pattern of marked Gothic character.

As has already been observed, western design has recurrently been refreshed by an infusion of eastern, often Chinese, ideas. Sometimes those have been used at one remove, revised by the western designer; at other times they have been allowed to speak for themselves with no more interpretation than that provided by the western beholder's delight in their inventiveness in patterning, the characteristically un-western use of color, their unfamiliar view of natural forms. The painted paper here shown is testimony not only to the China trade, that made the fortunes of many enterprising Americans in the last century, but to the taste of Americans who liked even the simpler and more routine productions of Chinese workshops. The paper, of which this is an unused piece, is known to have been hung in 1865 on the walls of a house at Nahant, Massachusetts.



1953-189-1

Width of detail, 24"



1952-147-2

Width of repeat, 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

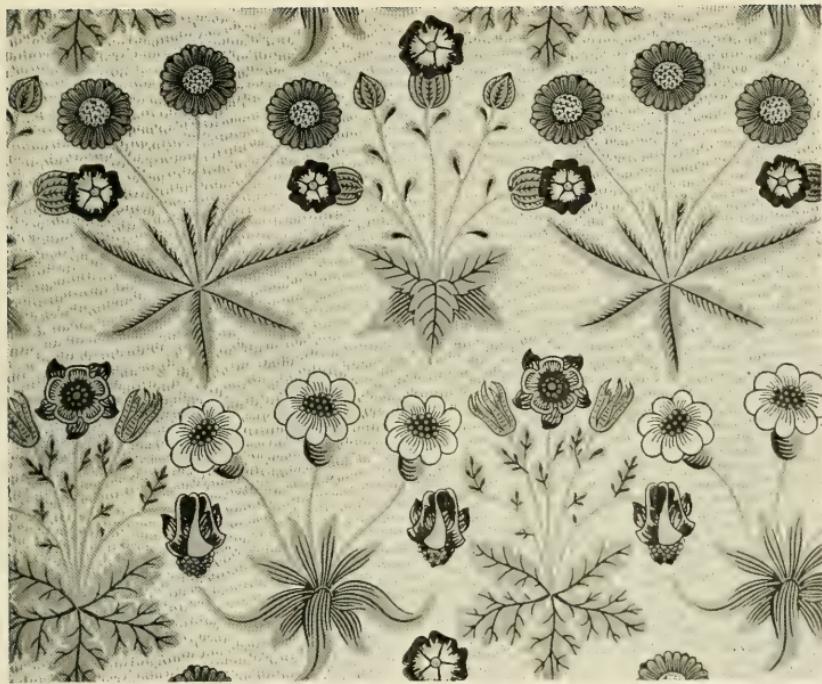
The early machine-made products of the Industrial Age,¹² although admired by most Victorians, were correspondingly despised by those few who saw the need to control their uninhibited growth. In this French wallpaper, designed to be used in a child's room of the 1870's or 80's, can be seen a relentless three-dimensionality in vivid coloring; perhaps in their very airlessness such papers unconsciously gave an advance notice of the simplification, the cleaning away of meaningless redundancy, that were to follow.



1938-62-18

Width of repeat, 18½"

It is questionable whether this paper belongs in a picture-book that concerns itself with well-designed wallpapers; but as the era of its production was not distinguished in the United States by excellence of design, the paper may be allowed here as a useful mirror rather than an admirable achievement. The organization of the pattern would have been considered eighty years ago to prove that its American designer was up to the minute in appreciating the newly-available lessons of Japanese asymmetrical patterning, while its muddy brown ground, touched with small spots of color and gilding, paid homage to western standards of subdued elegance and "richness." Juxtaposition of oriental porcelains with the Brooklyn Bridge, whose opening in 1883 the paper foretold, may strike one as inappropriate, even while one wonders whether our glass-house generation is in any position for throwing stones.



1935-23-7

Width shown, 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

Victorian fashions had little to do with two-dimensional design on a flat surface. In William Morris (1834-1896), wallpaper design found a master who clearly understood the principles of flat design and was able to express those principles with a great sensitivity of form, line, color and texture. Almost more important, he successfully established the reforms so necessary to cut back the untidy growth of Victorian clutter. With the first Morris paper to be produced commercially (in 1862),¹³ the "Daisy", a respect for the wall as a flat interior surface is once again evident in the design. Insisting on the use of wood-blocks to print his papers, Morris also returned to the designs of one of the earliest forms of wall-covering for his decorative elements; strongly suggestive of the gaiety of millefleurs tapestries, the delicately colored flowers are yet imbued with a timeless quality that kept the paper in uninterrupted production until the blocks were destroyed during the Second World War.



1955-144-7

Height 21"

Although William Morris strove to master all of the crafts in which he worked, his efforts to manufacture wallpaper fell short of full success, and he turned to the established firm of Jeffrey and Company for the execution of his designs. This firm, long under the leadership of Albert Warner, was an enlightened exponent of the period's best in design; and among other accomplished designers from whom it commissioned wallpapers in the later nineteenth century was the admired draughtsman and illustrator, Walter Crane (1854-1915). The illustration reproduces one of Crane's later designs; by 1896 he had evolved into a flatter style, more placid and subtle than his swirling, linear papers of the 1880's that seem to have provided one of the sources of the Art Nouveau style of the century's end. This paper, the "May Tree," meets the demand felt in its day — when ceilings were still at a respectable distance above the floor — for an actively interesting frieze to be set above a more non-committal filling paper; in its calm and effortless areas of flat color the frieze served to evoke the pleasure of landscape for a generation that would not have welcomed the fuller exposition made by such scenic papers as those produced earlier in France.¹⁴



1958-80-1

Width of detail, 19 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

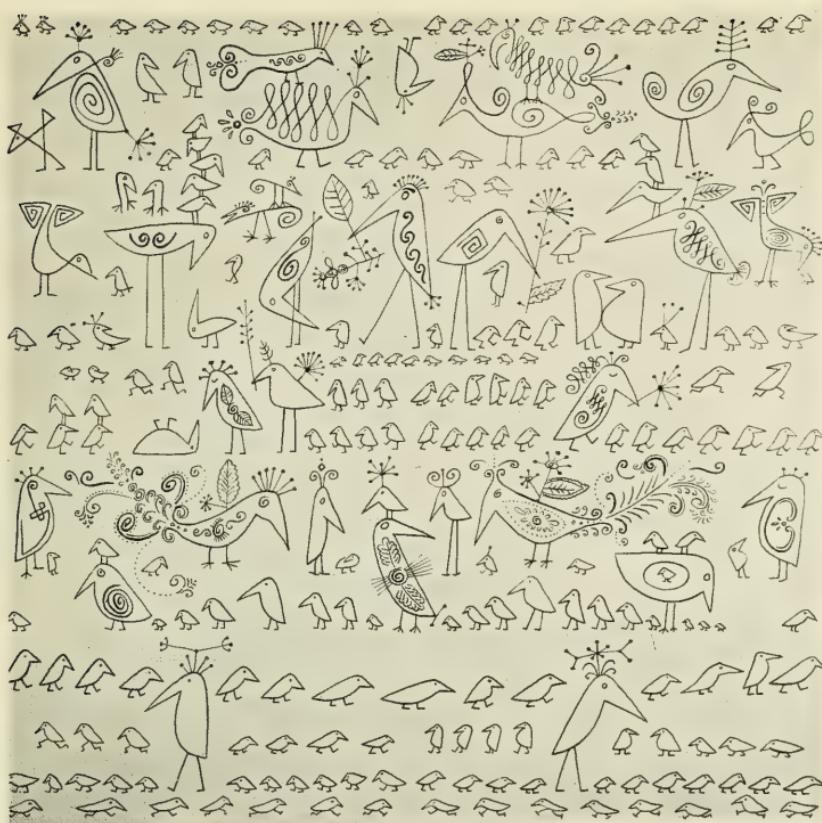
Early in the 20th century the principles of William Morris were given a new direction by a group of designers in Austria who, organized under the name of "Wiener Werkstätte,"¹⁵ sought to combine the lessons of Morris's artistic philosophy with the technical and economic advantages of machine production. The wallpaper of which a detail is shown on this page, designed by Dagobert Peche (1887-1923), clearly illustrates how careful application of past principles to a fresh and well-defined point of view resulted in a new style. The philosophy of Morris had served its purpose as leavening, but the influence of the Cubist painters from the Continent — and also the folk arts of Central Europe — transformed the philosopher's medievalism into design that is unmistakably of the 20th century. Forms in nature have been simplified, fractured and sharply abstracted, replacing with startling, angular action the fluid quality formerly expressed in floral patterns. The bright blossoms of former years have been relegated to minor elements, leaving the play of composition to bold, primitive strokes of simple leaf forms.



1958-80-5

Width, 22½"

Growing understanding of the new painting in Paris during the first years of the century produced a decorative style in printed wallpapers and textiles that was as carefree and self-indulgent as were the times themselves. But although artistically these were years of revolt and invention, the designs which ultimately became symbolic of the age were not without reference to background and tradition. José de Andrade has based the composition of this light-hearted and thoroughly 20th-century machine-printed wallpaper, "Amazon," on elements inescapably remembered from the 18th-century printed cottons often now referred to as "toiles de Jouy."¹⁶



1954-88-2

(Reproduced by Permission)

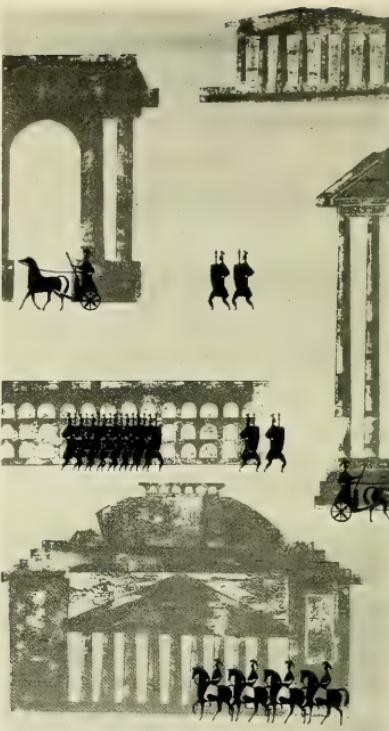
Width, 23 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

Among the most recent designs for wallpaper represented in the Museum's collection is this spirited pen and ink drawing by Saul Steinberg. Consisting entirely of birds, it is meant to entertain as much as to distribute pleasing and well-composed elements across a given area. This aspect of design provides many delightful additions to the fundamental objective of the designer's work: that of filling space on a wall.

Currently being produced by Piazza Prints, the wallpaper for which this drawing was prepared is a delightful reminder of its designer's well-known and admired comment on the nature of things.

The technique of printing designs through a piece of silk, tightly stretched across a light-weight wooden frame, closely approaches a quality heretofore achieved only by block-printing. Providing designers and manufacturers with a means of producing wallpaper of this quality while avoiding the cost of preparing woodblocks, the screen-printing process, over the past two decades, has come to account for the major portion of hand-printed papers.

"When in Rome," designed by Clarence Hawking for Denst and Soderlund, is a screen print not on paper but on a paper-supported textile. The golden yellow texture of the woven silk, reminiscent of the damasks of earlier centuries and the grass-cloth of Back Bay Boston, provides a pleasant foil to a scheme of black and grey. Work of such quality, imaginatively created from the viewpoint and attitude of our own time, is an admirable enrichment of the long history of printed wall-coverings which continues in the mid-twentieth century the vitality of an admired art.



1959-130-1

Width of detail, 18 1/2"

NOTES

¹Manufactured in Germany, Dutch gilt papers are so called because they were imported in great quantities into Holland during the 17th and 18th centuries, being exported in turn to England and America where their actual German origin was ignored. This confusion is similar to that surrounding "Lowestoft" porcelain.

²*Dominotiers*: the origin of this term remains debatable. The Guild of Parisian Dominotiers, organized in the 16th century, also produced printed sheets bearing religious images, and the derivation of Domino from Dominus is generally believed to explain the term.

³In English, *Wax-cloth*. Linen or cotton canvas stretched to frames, pasted with starch, ground with chalk, soot and varnish, smoothed with pumice stone, painted and decorated, and again varnished.

⁴Housed in the Schloss Wilhelmshöhe in Kassel, Germany, this is the only museum in the world devoted exclusively to wallpaper and wallcoverings.

⁵Starting early in the 17th century the different European East-Indian trading companies imported printed and painted textiles from India along with hand-painted papers from China believed to have been produced exclusively for the Western market, which were greatly admired and emulated by European designers.

⁶Printed, painted or stained papers were taxed in England from 1712 to 1836. A portion of this wallpaper has been folded to show the Georgian excise stamp on the reverse.

⁷Signed J. Pignet; dates and other work unknown.

⁸Attributed to the Chelsea factory of John Sherringham or Anthony George and Francis Frederick Eckhardt. Although very little can be said with certainty to have come from these workshops, contemporary accounts credit them with the finest papers produced in England during the late 18th century.

Perhaps one secret of Eckhardt's success lay in the extra brilliance imparted to some of his colors by a protective coating of soluble gum, shiny when dry — a technique observed also in the block-printed papers that thirty years later were used to cover American bandboxes.

⁹Highly popular during the late 17th and 18th centuries, *chinoiserie* is a fanciful Western interpretation of Far Eastern manners and styles based more on imagination than fact.

¹⁰This sample, taken from an unused length, was given to the Cooper Union Museum by the administration of the Royal Pavilion. The King's Bedroom has recently been redecorated with the pattern of the paper, though it is now painted direct onto the wall.

¹¹Strawberry Hill, the country house of Horace Walpole (1717-1797), was accessible for public visiting during his lifetime. Neo-Gothic ornament was used extensively in its decoration, which greatly influenced the revival of interest in Gothic decoration during the 18th century.

¹²Although machine-printed papers were being manufactured in the 1840's, block-printing continued to be employed in the production of finer, more expensive papers, sometimes with the use of over one hundred blocks for one paper. Various short-lived experiments were tried during the middle years of the 19th century to produce novel effects through mechanical means: goffering, simple striping, fused-blending of color, embossing. Of these, only embossing still survives to any great extent.

¹³The "Trellis" (C.U.M. 1941-74-119), Morris's first wallpaper design, was not commercially produced until after the "Daisy" was already on the market.

¹⁴The block-printed scenic wallpapers of Dufour, Zuber, Desfossé et Karth, and others are among the greatest wallpaper achievements of the 19th century. Present space limitations make it difficult to display these works in assembled form, but excellent examples are available for study and inspection in the Museum's collection.

¹⁵The Wiener Werkstätte in Austria and the Bauhaus in Germany were two groups organized early in the 20th century to reform architecture, crafts and the fine arts under a unified esthetic and philosophical point of view.

¹⁶A misnomer often used to indicate any regular repeat pattern of alternating, independent motifs — pastoral, floral, figural or architectural — resembling those of the cottons printed at Jouy, near Versailles, from 1759 to 1843, and at many other places.



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